

## Nymphalid butterfly communities in an amazonian forest fragment

Frederico Araujo Ramos

Departamento de Biociências, Centro Universitário de Brasília, SEPN 707/907, 70.790-07, Brasília, Brazil, E-mail: [framos@tba.com.br](mailto:framos@tba.com.br)

**Abstract.** Species diversity and abundance of fruit-feeding nymphalid butterflies were studied in an Amazon rain forest fragment. Butterflies were caught in baited traps in twelve areas, selected to sample a gradient of increasing disturbance. Measurements of six parameters of vegetation structure were also taken to estimate the disturbance. A total of 90 butterfly species were trapped. The greatest alpha diversities were found at the edge of the forest and in areas of intermediate disturbance. Canonical Correlation Analysis (CCA) showed that the composition of the species assemblages of nymphalids was related to vegetation structure variables, especially girth at breast height and number of tree morpho-species. The butterfly fauna appeared more similar in forested areas than in the disturbed ones. Some species were suggested as habitat indicators and the value of this guild of fruit-feeding butterflies in conservation programs is discussed.

**KEY WORDS:** Butterflies, nymphalids, diversity, community structure, disturbance, rain forest fragment, direct gradient analysis, Brazil.

### INTRODUCTION

One of the main objectives of community ecology is the synthesis of the roles of physical and biological factors that determine species abundance and distribution within and among natural communities. After MacArthur and MacArthur (1961) found a relationship between bird diversity and high vegetation diversity, ecologists verified that habitat complexity is an important factor for the structuring of local communities. Habitats that are structurally more complex and heterogeneous offer more niches, and therefore support a greater number of species (spatial heterogeneity, Pianka 1966). In addition this idea, Connell (1978) suggested that high diversity in tropical forests is maintained by disturbances, such as tree falls. Considering such dynamics, the forest can be seen as a mosaic of gaps in different successional stages, with different local communities, and a high regional diversity.

Although biogeographic and historical conditions are extremely important factors in structuring communities (Slansky 1972, Ricklefs 1987, Leps and Spitzer 1990, Brown 1982, Brown 1991, Thomas 1991, Gaston 1996), local factors also affect local butterfly diversity (Emmel and Leck 1969, Montesinos 1985, DeVries 1994, Kitahara and Fujii 1994, Sparks and Par-

ish 1995). Many studies have shown that tropical butterfly communities also respond to physical factors of the habitat, such as topography, stratification, gaps, edges, urbanization and habitat disturbances (Ruszczyk 1986, DeVries 1988, Raguso and Llorente-Bousquets 1990, Brown 1991, Hill et al. 1992, Pinheiro and Ortiz, 1992, Hill et al. 1995, Spitzer et al. 1997). As such, multivariate analysis has proven to be an important tool when investigating the relationships between species assemblages and environmental variables (Leps and Spitzer 1990, Kremen 1992, Ramos 1992, Väisänen 1992, Spitzer et al. 1993, Spitzer et al. 1997, Blair and Launer 1997).

The objectives of this study are (1) to measure neotropical nymphalid butterfly diversity along a gradient of disturbance, (2) to explore the species-environment relationships through a direct gradient analysis and (3) identify the most important butterfly species and vegetation variables, which could be used in conservation monitoring programs.

## METHODS

**Study site.** This study was conducted in a forest fragment at the boundary of the eastern Amazon (5°01'S, 47°32'W; 260 m), a region where the natural landscape has been greatly modified by human activity. The study site was about 50 km north of the transition to Cerrado. The fragment has about 1,000 ha of primary forest with several levels of disturbance, surrounded by secondary forest in several successional stages, eucalyptus monocultures and cattle pasture. I selected 12 sample units (SUs) throughout a disturbance gradient: forest understory (FU1, FU2, FU3), forest roads (FR1, FR2, FR3), edge (EDG), highly disturbed forest understory (DFU), highly disturbed forest road (DFR), 4-year-old secondary forest (SF4), 2-year-old secondary forests (SF2) and *Eucalyptus pellita* monoculture (EUC).

**Data collection.** I made lepidoptera collections between June 1990 and July 1991. For each of 12 SUs, three fruit-baited traps were set in line, suspended 1.0-1.7 meters above the ground, and 25 meters apart from one another. For each collection, the traps were visited for 14 consecutive days. The banana and sugar cane bait was kept moist for the duration of the trapping period. The disturbance level of each SU was estimated using vegetation parameters obtained through the point-centered method (Müller-Dumbois and Ellemberg 1974), with 21 quartered points established per SU, only for trees up to 20 cm of circumference at breast high. This method was chosen for its simplicity and common use in phytosociological surveys. The following vegetation variables were used: average *girth at breast height* (GBH); estimated average *tree height* (THG); *number of tree morpho-species* (NMS) estimated by rind and leaf characteristics, with the help of a local guide; *tree density* within 100 m<sup>2</sup> (DEN); average *horizontal cover* (HOC), estimated at each sample point by an observation made on a 50 cm square carton held 10 m from the observer in each quarter. Cover was estimated to be within one of four categories (0-25%, 25-50%, 50-75% and 75-100% vegetation cover); average *vertical cover* (VEC), estimated by the four previously mentioned vegetation cover categories, applying a 10 cm square frame held at a distance of 60 cm from the observer at an angle of approximately 20° in relation to zenith.

Table 1. Alpha diversity of fruit-feeding butterfly species in twelve sample units of an Amazonian forest fragment.

	Forest understory			Forest road			Edge Disturbed forest			Secondary forest		Eucalypt monoc	Total
	FU1	FU2	FU3	FR1	FR2	FR3	EDG	DFU	DFR	SF4	SF2	EUC	
Number of individuals (N)	63	43	97	114	111	106	334	267	571	490	744	604	3544
Nymphalinae richness	3	5	6	11	13	12	15	16	19	17	16	12	29
Satyrinae richness	13	11	15	14	16	13	27	14	20	19	20	17	41
Brassolinae richness	1	1	2	0	1	1	5	2	4	3	2	2	6
Charaxinae richness	0	2	3	2	3	6	6	6	6	7	3	3	13
Total species richness (S)	18	20	27	28	34	33	54	39	50	47	42	34	90
Species diversity ( $H'$ )	2.27	2.76	2.60	2.79	3.08	3.06	3.38	3.06	3.19	3.00	2.28	2.09	3.26

**Data analysis.** The butterfly alpha diversity of each SU was quantified by the species richness (S) and Shannon-Wiener index ( $H'$ ). To evaluate environmental effects on the butterfly community I ran a Canonical Correspondence Analysis (CCA), using the program CANOCO (TerBraak 1988). The vegetation parameter estimates of habitat disturbance were used as environmental variables in the CCA. The variable tree height was removed from the analysis due to its high value of inflation, and high colinearity with the other variables. The significance of species-environment relationships was tested using a Monte Carlo test.

## RESULTS

A total sample effort of 2,016 trap days (=3 traps x 12 SUs x 56 days) resulted in 3,544 individuals collected, representing 90 species of five subfamilies of Nymphalidae. The five most abundant species were *Paryphthimoides phronius*, *Yphthimoides* sp1, *Yphthimoides disaffecta*, *Hermeuptychia hermes* and *Cissia penelope*, all belonging to the subfamily Satyrinae, representing 45.3% of the total number of individuals collected. A complete list of species abundances in each SU can be seen in Appendix 1. The total butterfly diversity in the rain forest fragment sampled was  $H' = 3.258$ .

An analysis of alpha diversity showed that edges and areas of intermediate disturbance presented higher species richness and diversity (Table 1). Although more disturbed areas, such as eucalyptus monoculture and 2-year-old secondary forest had higher species richnesses than forest, they had lower species diversities, due to the high dominance of the Satyrinae species. This pattern was not found when other groups were considered separately: Satyrinae and Brassolinae had higher species richnesses in the disturbed areas, with a peak of the edge; Charaxinae and Nymphalinae had higher species richnesses in the road, edge and disturbed forest areas.

The CCA ordination diagram shows the relationships between butterfly species, sample units and environmental variables (Figure 1). By comparing the arrow lengths, one may evaluate the significance of the constraining vegetation variables. The arrow points roughly in the direction of the maximum variation in the value of the corresponding variable. The spe-

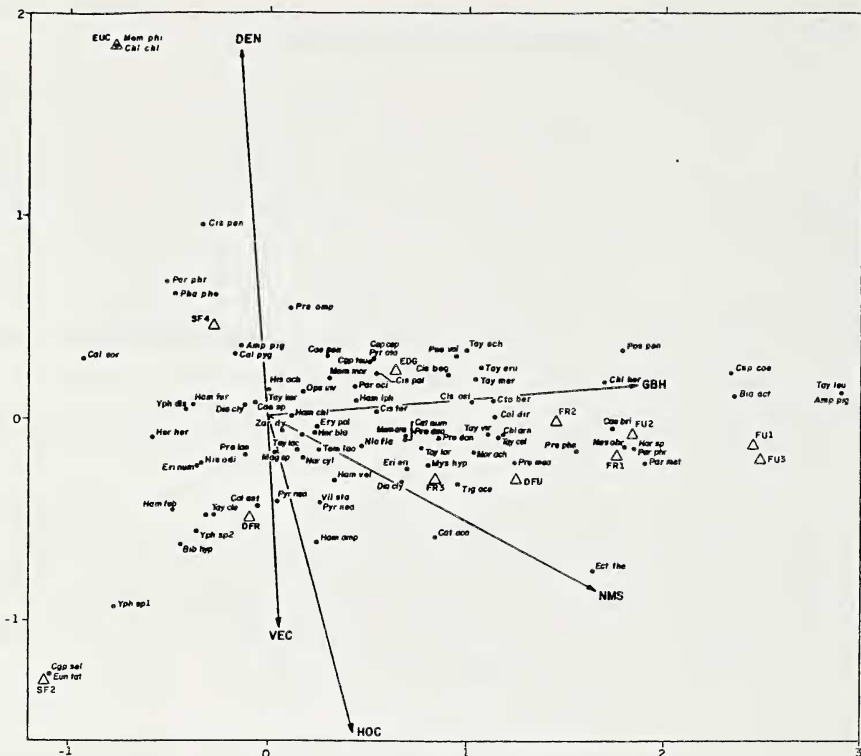


Figure 1. CCA ordination of the fruit-feeding butterfly communities in an Amazonian forest fragment, with respect to five vegetation variables (arrows). The species are abbreviated according to the first three letters of their generic and the first three letters of their specific names (see Appendix 1 for full names). The vegetation variables are: average girth at breast height (GBH), estimated average tree height (THG), number of tree morpho-species (NMS), tree density within 100 m<sup>2</sup> (DEN), estimated average horizontal cover (HOC) and estimated average vertical cover (VEC). The sample units are forest understory (FU1, FU2, FU3), forest roads (FR1, FR2, FR3), edge (EDG), highly disturbed forest understory (DFU), highly disturbed forest road (DFR), 4-year-old secondary forest (SF4), 2-year-old secondary forests (SF2) and *Eucalyptus pellita* monoculture (EUC).

cies far from the origin are rare and less important to analysis. The Monte Carlo permutation test showed that those species are significantly related to supplied vegetation variables (99 permutations,  $P < 0.01$ ).

In the first CCA axis, girth at breast height presented the highest absolute value, followed by the number of tree morpho-species, both contributing to the species data fit. This axis clearly shows a gradient of disturbance — preserved areas with a greater richness of large bole trees on the positive side, and disturbed or early successional ones on the negative side. The



ordination also shows how species respond to vegetation variables: with invader species typical of open areas (the small Satyrinae *Hermeuptychia hermes*, *Ypthimoides sp1*, *Y. disaffecta*, *Cissia penelope*, *Erichtodes numeria* and *Pharneuptychia pharnaces*, and the Nymphalinae *Hamadryas feronia*, *H. februa* and *Biblis hyperia*) showing negative scores. With positive scores, near the origin, are the heliophyllous species of the disturbed forests, gaps, edges and canopy (*Eryphanis polyxena*, *Hamadryas ipthime*, *H. velutina*, *Memphis morvus*, *Narope cyllabarus*, *Nica flavilla*, *Pareuptychia ocirrhoe*, *Temenis laothoe* and *Taygetes laches*). The species on the right side of the diagram are typical of the forest understory (*Colobura dirce*, *Morpho achilles*, *Nessaea obrinus*, *Taygetes celia*, *T. echo* and *T. virgilia*). The second axis was primarily related to tree density and horizontal cover, but did not form a clear gradient. The analysis gave a large weight to some Satyrinae species, such as *Cissia penelope* and *Parypthimoides phronius*, which had large populations in high tree density eucalyptus monoculture.

## DISCUSSION

The forest edge and intermediate disturbance forest presented higher values of butterfly species richness and diversity. These environments, where intense regeneration occurs, have high productivity and maintain high population levels. On the other hand, the disturbance rate is high, thus reducing the effect of competitive exclusion. A number of ecologically based hypotheses have been proposed to explain patterns of species richness and diversity, but not all of them are mutually exclusive (Meffe and Carroll 1997). The productivity-disturbance hypothesis (Huston 1994) combines elements of several other hypotheses, proposing that the high productivity and the disturbance rate conditions of forest edges and gaps result in high species richness. The results of this study tend to agree with this hypothesis. Additionally, the mixture of forest understory umbrophyllous species with open area heliophyllous ones raises the local diversity. The fact that edges, gaps, physiognomic transitions, and disturbed and secondary forests have high diversity has been documented many times elsewhere (Leps and Spitzer 1990, Raguso and Llorente-Bousquets 1990, Hill et al. 1992, Pinheiro and Ortiz 1992, Väinsänen 1992, Spitzer et al. 1993, Spitzer et al. 1997). For sunloving species, drastic changes in light intensity can act as a habitat barrier, while edges, gaps and canopies may be treated as a continuum of sunny, open area. Other species, however, remain restricted to shady environments (DeVries 1988).

The number of tree morpho-species was not a good predictor of the number of butterfly species. Because the group is herbivorous, butterfly - host plant relationships have been explored (Gilbert and Smiley 1978, Erhardt and Thomas 1991), although not always being meaningful (Sharp et al. 1974, Courtney and Chew 1987, Singer and Ehrlich 1991). Besides that, the sampling considered only trees, and did not consider bushes, herbs and lianas that are host plants of several butterflies (DeVries 1987). Although not related with butterfly alpha diversity, the number of tree morpho-species was

important in the formation of an environmental gradient, and is related to habitat disturbance.

The ordination diagram shows that the forest assemblages are homogeneous, but among disturbed areas there are great variations in species composition and abundance. A larger constancy of forest communities has been verified for neotropical satyrins (Brown 1991), and butterflies of South-eastern Asia (Leps and Spitzer 1990), but the opposite pattern was found for Notodontidae and Arctiinae in the same forest fragment (Dubois 1993).

Although other butterfly groups such as Ithomiinae and Heliconinae have been suggested as more efficient indicators (Brown 1991, Beccaloni and Gaston 1995), the use of the fruit-feeding Nymphalidae has its utility in conservation programs (Daily and Ehrlich 1995). The results of the CCA ordination show that butterfly communities have a significant relationship with vegetation variables, and suggest the use of this assemblage as an appropriate indicator of habitat heterogeneity over this spatial scale. CCA can be used to match a species assemblage to environmental factors for which it is a good indicator, and select a subset of species as indicators for more intensive monitoring (Kremen 1992). Since rare species have little weight in the analysis (TerBraak 1988), common species, and not rare ones, should be selected from this guild to be used as indicators. Thus, *Hermeuptychia hermes*, *Yphthimoides sp1*, *Y. disaffecta*, *Cissia penelope*, *Erichthodes numeria*, *Pharneuptychia pharnaces*, *Hamadryas feronia*, *H. februa* and *Biblis hyperia* may serve as indicators of disturbed environments, and *Colobura dirce*, *Morpho achilles*, *Nessaea obrinus*, *Taygetis celia*, *T. echo* and *T. virgilia* indicators of more preserved environments.

The use of higher taxa for biodiversity measurements (Williams and Gaston 1994) can be an important management tool for situations where taxonomic identification at the species level is difficult. For the same data set, counting only subfamily abundance, Ramos (1992) obtained similar ordination patterns as when counting species abundance. Another advantage of this fruit-feeding guild is that it can easily be sampled with traps, simultaneously in several points. Using appropriate criteria and guidelines, as suggested by Sparrow et al. (1994), this nymphalid fauna may be an informative species subset for monitoring programs.

The collection of vegetation variables was designed to be as simple as possible. Of course, other local habitat variables that are important for adult butterflies which could have been measured were not quantified. Among the physical and structural variables are the size of the area, topography, temperature, humidity, light, gaps, roosts and dormitories, and ground pattern. Important biological factors for adults include food and ovoposition site availability, predators and mimics.

Local diversity is determined not only by local factors, but also by regional and historical factors (Ricklefs 1987). Aside from the limits of the local habitat structure, the local butterfly assemblage depends on the regional species pool and historical processes such as climatic changes, isolation, extinction and speciation. The rapid fragmentation of the Amazon rain

forest may be contributing to butterfly extinctions, especially larger species with scarce resources - Morphinae, Brassolinae and Charaxinae (Brown 1991). Alternatively, the vegetation structure of disturbed forest is suitable for sun-lovers, secondary and opportunistic species that may spread throughout the region. Some of these butterflies are common in open biomes such as the Cerrado. For example, *Hamadryas februa*, *H. feronia*, *Erichthodes numeria* and *Hermeuptychia hermes* are as abundant in cerrado *strictu sensu* of central Brazil (Pinheiro and Ortiz 1992) as in the disturbed areas of the fragment studied.

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**Appendix 1.** Vegetation structure variables and abundance of fruit-feeding butterfly species in twelve sample units of an Amazonian forest fragment. Each species has an abbreviation with the first three letters of the generic and specific names that are used in Figure 1.

	Forest understory			Forest road			Edge forest			Disturbed forest			Secondary Eucalypts forest monoculture			Total
	FU1	FU2	FU3	FR1	FR2	FR3	EDG	DFU	DFR	SF4	SF2	EUC				
<b>Vegetation structure variables</b>																
Average tree high (m)	13.8	13.4	18.8	15.7	15.7	13.6	12.4	10.9	10.3	8.1	7.8	16.0				
Average horizontal cover	3.58	3.30	3.36	3.25	3.44	3.77	3.99	3.39	3.61	4.00	3.79	1.33				
Average vertical cover	3.52	3.82	3.93	3.11	3.44	1.96	3.52	3.74	2.74	3.30	2.89	2.82				
Number of tree morfo-species	39	46	49	47	43	38	19	35	33	19	13	1				
Tree density (tree / 100m <sup>2</sup> )	7.85	8.57	7.02	4.44	6.33	5.03	4.13	7.59	7.57	7.24	2.16	15.60				
Average Girth at breast hight	59.1	61.4	73.9	69.4	63.9	61.2	50.8	44.8	38.0	34.0	27.5	34.8				
<b>Butterfly species</b>																
<b>MORPHINAE</b>																
Mor ach	14	4	13	22	15	9	18	25	26	14	3	163				
<b>NYMPHALINAE</b>																
Bib hyp													50			
Cal ast							1	2	14	8	25	2				
Cal mai				1			1	1	1			4				
Cal pyg													5			
Cal sor										5	1	1	2			
Cat aco				1					1			2				
Cat num													1			
Col dir	19	5	29	11	10	9	22	44	15	13	2	9	188			
Dia cly					1	1	2		12	6	2	4	28			
Ect the				1									1			
Eun tat											4		4			







